Ashurian Aramaic

Ashurian (𐡀𐡔𐡅𐡓𐡀𐡉𐡀 𐡋𐡔𐡔𐡀𐡍𐡀 *Leššānā Assūrāyā*) is a dialect of Middle Aramaic that was once the dialect of the region encompassing the cities of Assur and Hatra and the Nineveh plains in the centre, up to Tur Abdin in the north, Dura-Europos in the west and Tikrit in the south. The majority of the evidence of the language comes from inscriptions within the cities dating between 100 BC and the mid-200s AD, coinciding with Shapur I's destruction of Hatra in 241 AD and Assur in 257 AD.[3][4] As a result of Hatra being the site with the most attestation, it is often referred to as Hatran Aramaic. Having conquered the Aramaen city-states to the west, the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-605 BC) adopted Old Aramaic as the official language alongside the Assyrian Akkadian language. With the Achaemenid Empire succeeding them and adopting Old Aramaic, it rose to become the lingua franca of Iran, Mesopotamia and the Levant.[5]

Ashurian Aramaic	
𐡀𐡔𐡅𐡓𐡀𐡉𐡀 𐡋𐡔𐡔𐡀𐡍𐡀 *Leššānā Assūrāyā*	
Leššānā Asūrāyā in its own alphabet	
Pronunciation	/lɛʃʃɑːnɑː Assurɑːjɑː/
Region	Upper Mesopotamia
Era	Dramatically declined as a vernacular language after the 14th century[1]
Language family	Afro-Asiatic ▪ Semitic ▪ Central Semitic ▪ Northwest Semitic ▪ Aramaic ▪ Eastern Aramaic ▪ **Ashurian Aramaic**
Writing system	Hatran alphabet
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	–
Glottolog	assy1241 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/assy1241)[2]

22 Letters of the Ashurian alphabet

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Development

Ashurian, also referred to as Hatran Aramaic, developed through dialectic deviation as well as producing its own script. Various dialects of Aramaic developed around major cities or regions including the sister dialect of Syriac (city of Edessa), Mandaic (region surrounding the head of the Persian Gulf, Nabataean (from the Negev to the east bank of the Jordan River and the Sinai Peninsula), Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (Babylon), Palmyrene (Palmyra) and various Palestinian sub dialects (Palestine). Syriac, Mandaic and Christian Palestinian Aramaic also developed their own variants of the original script which is still employed today by Western Neo-Aramaic speakers as well as members of the Jewish nation for Hebrew who refer to it as 'Ktāḇ Āšūrī' (Assyrian writing) since it was the Assyrian monarchs who promulgated it.[6]

Ashurian Aramaic and Syriac have been heavily influenced by Akkadian, partly due to the proximity to the heartland as well as the native Assyrians having adopted these two dialects. Many commonly-used nouns such as month names were burrowed from Akkadian as well as being influenced phonologically, morphologically and syntactically.[7]

History

The city of Nisibis came under siege several times during the Roman-Persian Wars. However, in 363 AD the Romans were forced to surrender the city to the Persians and standby as the Christian population was expelled.[8] St Ephrem the Syrian was one of these refugees and ended up settling in Edessa. The city was flourishing with pagans, quite the opposite to his beloved Nisibis which had been a bastion for Syriac-speaking Christians.[9] As Edessa's demographics shifted to a Christian-majority which used Syriac as the language of worship, the language rose to become the new regional lingua franca. Well over 70 important Syriac writers are known from the gold age of Syriac (5th - 9th centuries), stretching from the Levant and the Sinai to the foothills of the Zagros Mountains and Qatar.[10] Combined with the devastation of the cities of Assur and Hatra, Syriac replaced the language of the locals and remained as a major language until its decline following the Mongol invasions and conquests and rise of the Neo-Aramaic languages.

Evidence and attestation

With Hatra enjoying great prosperity during the life of the language, the city has by far the most inscriptions with the city of Assur also containing numerous inscriptions. The rest of the evidence is spread sparsely throughout Dura-Europos, Gaddāla, Tikrit, Qabr Abu Naif, Abrat al-Sagira and Sa'adiya.[11] The surviving corpus which has been published, transliterated and translated consists of commemorative and votive inscriptions, similar to those found in Edessa, Palmyra and among the Nabataean inscriptions. This method usually includes the date of completion of the writing, place, person who commissioned the inscription or statue as well as the scribe's own details on some occasions. Unlike the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and the Syriac scribes of the Sasanian realm, the regal year is not included.[12] Both Assyro-Babylonian and Arabian gods are mentioned in the inscriptions including Ashur, Allat, Bel, Gad (Tyche), Nabu, Nasr, (Apollo), Shamash and Sin. While both cities also attest the personal names of affluent citizens, the Hatran rulers with distinctly Parthian names are attested only in Hatra.[13]

Ashurian Transliteration	English Translation	Syriac Equivalent
'Assurḥēl	Ashur is powerful	𐣀𐣔𐣓𐣇𐣋 𐣀𐣔𐣓
'Assurḥannī	Ashur took pity on me	𐣀𐣔𐣓 𐣇𐣓𐣄𐣀 𐣋
'Assurəmar	Ashur has declared	𐣀𐣔𐣓 𐣄𐣀𐣓
'Assurnṯan	Ashur has given (compare with Esarhaddon)	𐣀𐣔𐣓 𐣋𐣔
'Assur'qab	Ashur has replaced (a son)	𐣀𐣔𐣓 𐣅𐣁
'Assuršma'	Ashur has heard (our prayer/supplication)	𐣀𐣔𐣓 𐣅𐣔
'Assurtāreṣ	Ashur set (it) right	𐣀𐣔𐣓 𐣉𐣔
'Ap̄rahāṭ	Aphrahat (or sage)	𐣀𐣓 𐣐𐣓𐣄𐣀𐣓 𐣀𐣅
Bēṯ(ə)lāhyhaḇ	The house of God has given (a son)	𐣀𐣔𐣓 𐣇𐣅 𐣄𐣔
Bar Nērgāl	Son of Nergal	𐣋𐣉 𐣇
Bar Nešrā	Son of Nasr (the eagle)	𐣀𐣕𐣔 𐣇
Māranyhaḇ	Our lord has given (a son)	𐣉𐣇 𐣄𐣔
Māryā	The lord (used as a term for the Hatran rulers before using the title king; used by Syriac-speaking Christians to refer to God)	𐣀𐣇
Mlāḇēl	Bel has filled	𐣋 𐣋𐣐
Nḇūḇnā	Nabu has built (a son)	𐣋 𐣐𐣋
Nḇūḡabbār	Nabu is mighty	𐣀𐣋𐣉𐣋
Nḇūdayyān	Nabu is the judge	𐣀𐣕 𐣋
Nērgāldammar	Nergal is wondrous	𐣀𐣇𐣓𐣋 𐣋𐣉
Nešrānṯan	Nasr has given (a son)	𐣀𐣕𐣔 𐣋𐣔
Sanaṭrūq	Sanatruq I and Sanatruq II	𐣓𐣓𐣋𐣔
Slōkh	Seleucus	𐣎𐣋𐣓
Walagaš	Vologash	𐣅𐣋𐣓

Summary table

The Ashurian alphabet consists of the following letters. Ligatures have been used in certain inscriptions, although it appears to be optional.[14]

Name	Letter	Sound Value		Numerical Value	Syriac Equivalent	Phoenician Equivalent	Hebrew Equivalent	Arabic Equivalent
	Inscription Form	Transliteration	IPA					
*ʾĀlap̄**		ʾ or nothing	[ʔ] or silent	1			א	ا
Bēṯ		hard: *b* soft: *ḇ* (also *bh*, *v*, *β*)	hard: [b] soft: [v] or [w]	2			ב	ب
Gāmal		hard: *g* soft: *ḡ* (also *ġ*, *gh*, *ġ*, *γ*)	hard: [g] soft: [ɣ]	3			ג	ج
*Dālaṯ**		hard: *d* soft: *ḏ* (also *dh*, *ð*, *δ*)	hard: [d] soft: [ð]	4			ד	ذ, د
*Hē**		*h*	[h]	5			ה	ه
*Waw**		consonant: *w* mater lectionis: *ū* or *ō* (also *u* or *o*)	consonant: [w] mater lectionis: [u] or [o]	6			ו	و
*Zayn**		*z*	[z]	7			ז	ز
Ḥēṯ		*ḥ*	[ħ], [χ], or [χ̄]	8			ח	خ, ح
Ṭēṯ		*ṭ*	[tˤ]	9			ט	ظ, ط
Yōḏ		consonant: *y* mater lectionis: *ī* (also *i*)	consonant: [j] mater lectionis: [i] or [e]	10			י	ي
Kāp̄		hard: *k* soft: *ḵ* (also *kh*, *x*)	hard: [k] soft: [x]	20			כ ך	ك
Lāmaḏ		*l*	[l]	30			ל	ل
Mīm		*m*	[m]	40			מ ם	م
Nūn		*n*	[n]	50			נ ן	ن
Semkaṯ		*s*	[s]	60			ס	—
ʿĒ		ʿ	[ʕ]	70			ע	غ, ع
Pē		hard: *p* soft: *p̄* (also *ṗ*, *ꝑ*, *ph*, *f*)	hard: [p] soft: [f]	80			פ ף	ف
*Ṣāḏē**		*ṣ*	[sˤ]	90			צ ץ	ض, ص
Qōp̄		*q*	[q]	100			ק	ق
*Rēš**		*r*	[r]	200			ר	ر
Šīn		*š* (also *sh*)	[ʃ]	300			ש	ش, س
*Taw**		hard: *t*	hard: [t]	400			ת	

	𐣦	soft: *ṯ* (also *th*, *θ*)	soft: [θ]		𐣩		ث, ت

Unicode

Hatran/Ashurian script was added to the Unicode Standard in June, 2015 with the release of version 8.0.

The Unicode block for Hatran/Ashurian is U+108E0–U+108FF:

Hatran[1][2]
Official Unicode Consortium code chart (https://www.unicode.org/charts/PDF/U108E0.pdf) (PDF)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	A	B	C	D	E	F
U+108Ex	𐣠	𐣡	𐣢	𐣣	𐣤	𐣥	𐣦	𐣧	𐣨	𐣩	𐣪	𐣫	𐣬	𐣭	𐣮	𐣯
U+108Fx	𐣰	𐣱	𐣲		𐣴	𐣵						𐣻	𐣼	𐣽	𐣾	𐣿

Notes

1.^ As of Unicode version 13.0
2.^ Grey areas indicate non-assigned code points

See also

- Assur
- Hatra
- Palmyra
- Syriac
- Roman-Persian Wars

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